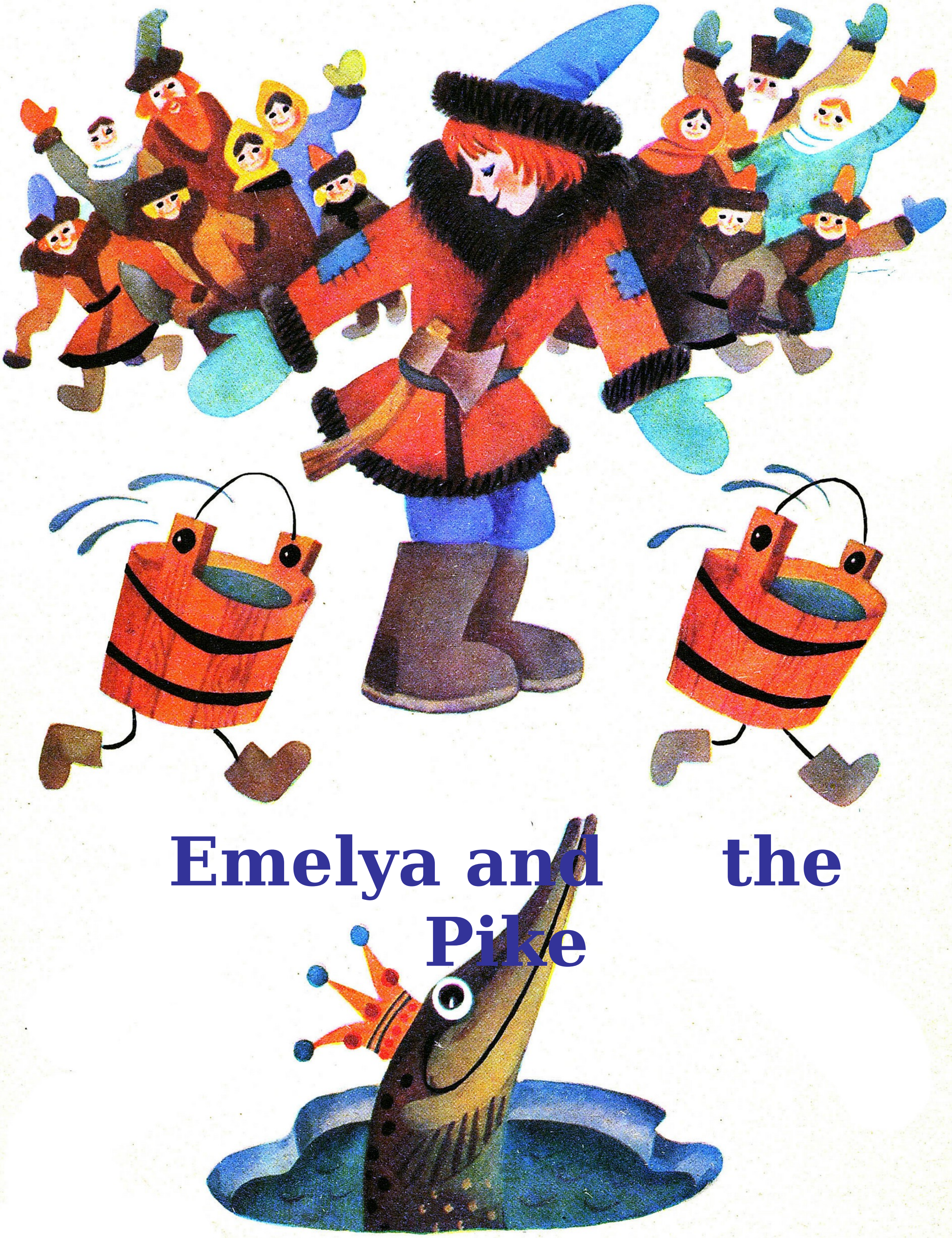
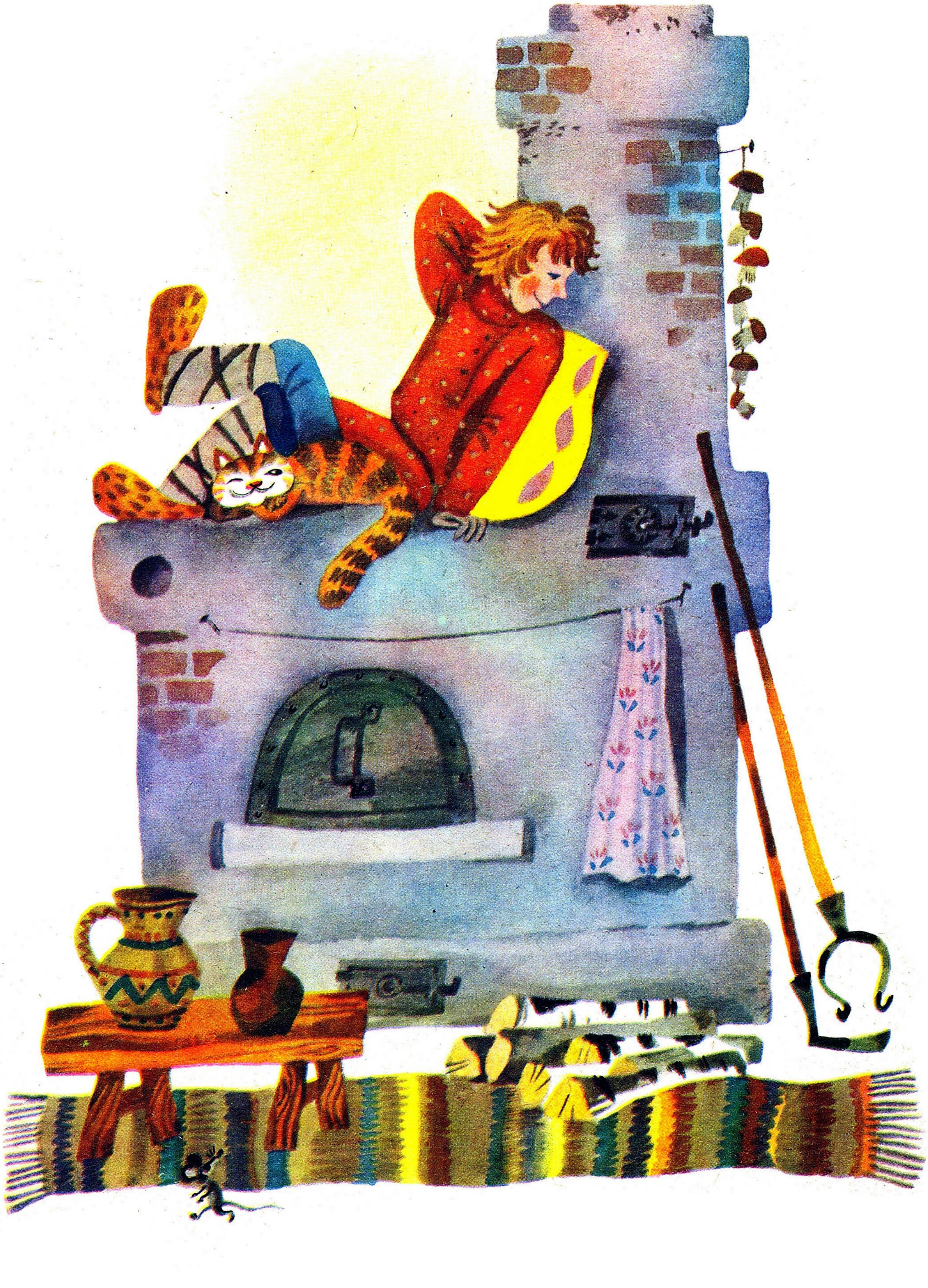
Emelya and the Pike



Emelya and the Pike

Russian fairy tale

Translated by Bernard Isaacs
Illustrations by Mikhail Belomlinsky



Once upon a time there lived an old man who had three sons, two of them clever young men and the third, Emelya, a fool. The two elder brothers were always at work, while Emelya lay on the stove ledge all day long with not a care in the world.

One day the two brothers rode away to market, and their wives said: "Go and fetch some water, Emelya."

And Emelya, lying on the stove ledge, replied: "Not I. I don't want to."

"Go, Emelya, or your brothers will bring no presents for you from the market."

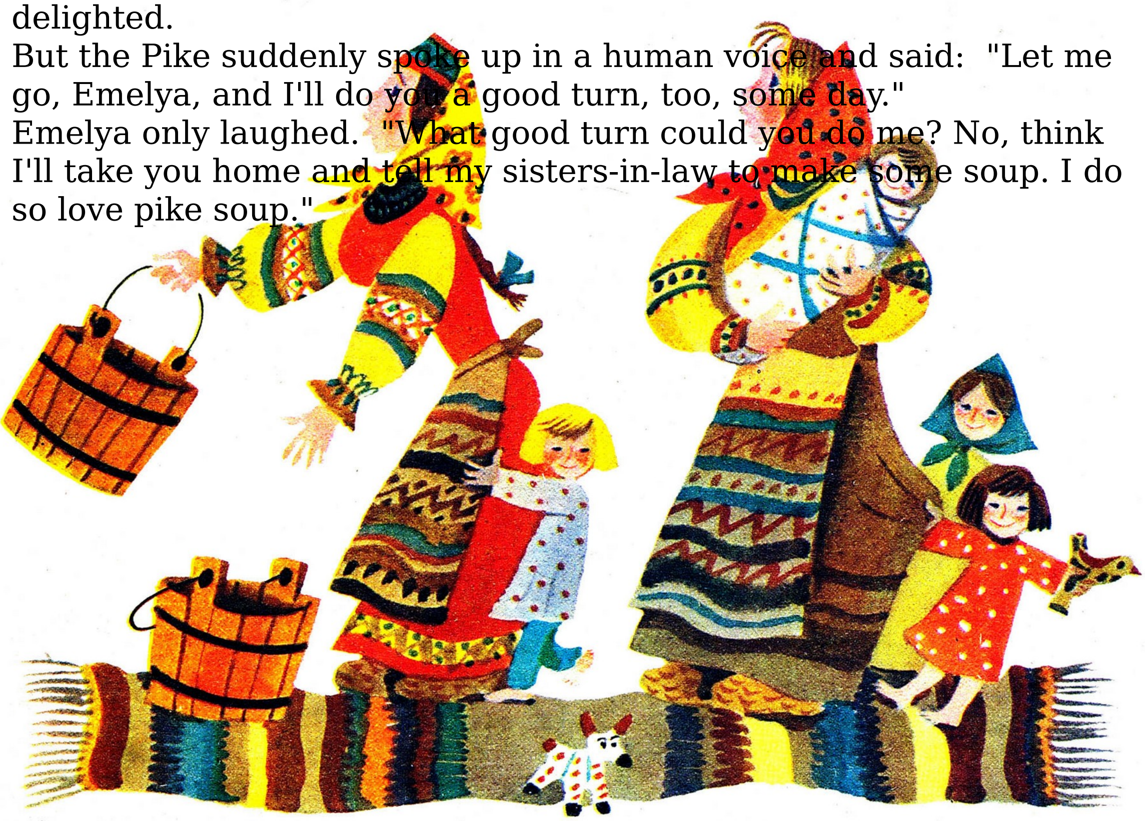
"Oh, all right then."

Down climbed Emelya from the stove, put on his boots and caftan and, taking along two pails and an axe, went to the river. He cut a hole in the ice with his axe, scooped up two pailfuls of water, put down the pails and himself bent down to look into the ice-hole. He looked and he looked and what did he see but a Pike swimming in the water. Out shot his arm, and there was the Pike in his hands.

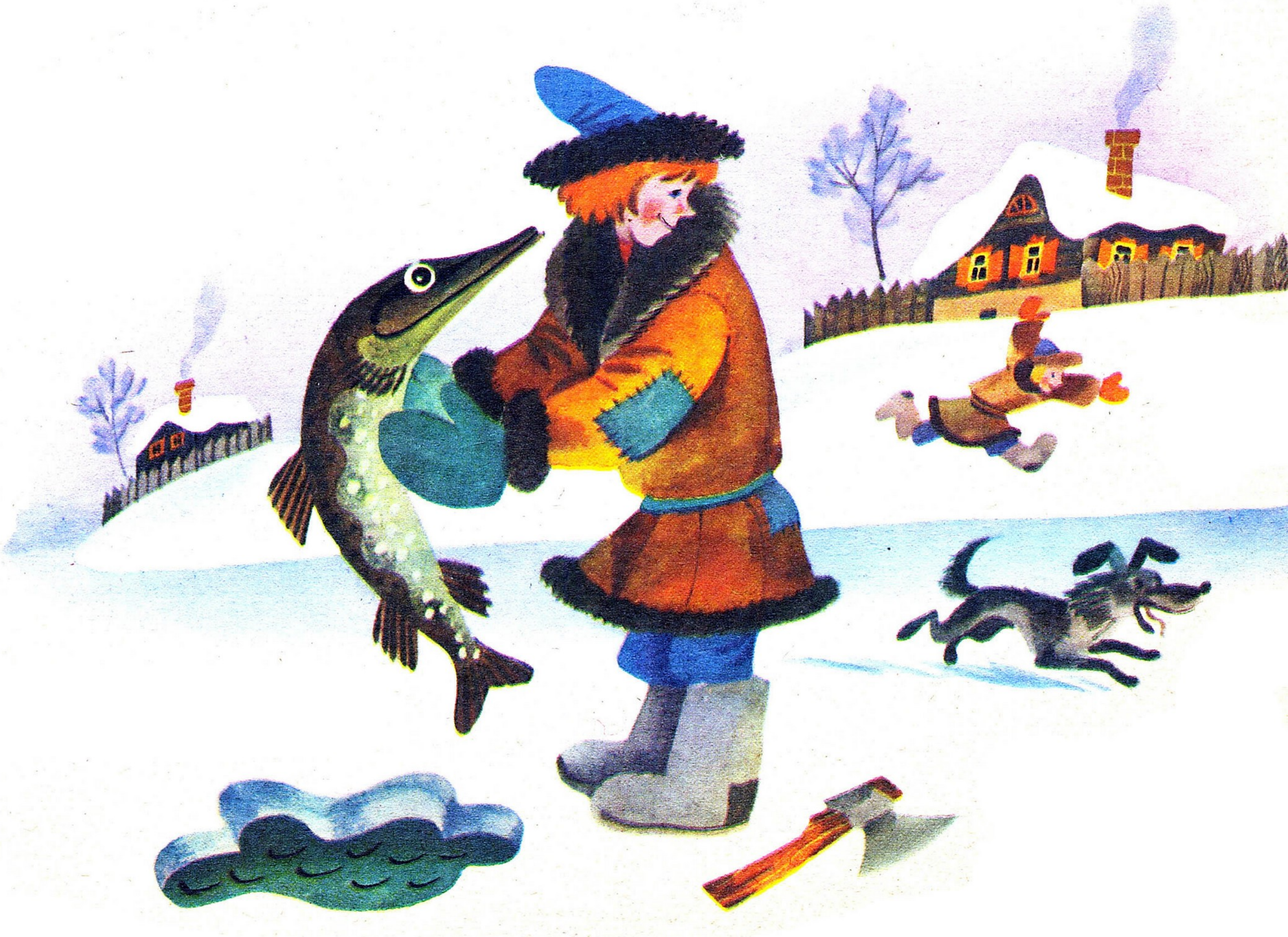
"We'll have some fine pike soup for dinner to-day!" he exclaimed, delighted.

But the Pike suddenly spoke up in a human voice and said: "Let me go, Emelya, and I'll do you a good turn, too, some day."

Emelya only laughed. "What good turn could you do me? No, think I'll take you home and tell my sisters-in-law to make some soup. I do so love pike soup."



But the Pike fell to begging him again and said: "Do let me go, Emelya, and I'll do anything you wish."
"All right," Emelya replied, "only first you must prove you aren't trying to fool me."
Said the Pike: "Tell me what you want, Emelya."
"I want my pails to go home all by themselves without spilling a drop of water."
"Very well, Emelya," the Pike said, "Whenever you wish something, you have only to say: " 'By will of the Pike, do as I like', and it will all be done at once."
And Emelya, nothing loath, said: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go home, pails, by yourselves !"
And, lo and behold! the pails turned and marched up the hill.
Emelya put the Pike back into the ice-hole and himself walked after his pails.



On went the pails along the village street, and the villagers stood round and marvelled while Emelya followed the pails, chuckling. The pails marched straight into Emelya's hut and jumped up on the bench, and Emelya climbed up on to the stove ledge again.

A long time passed by and a little time, and his sisters-in-law said to Emelya: "Why are you lying there, Emelya? Go and chop us some wood."

"Not I. I don't want to," Emelya said.

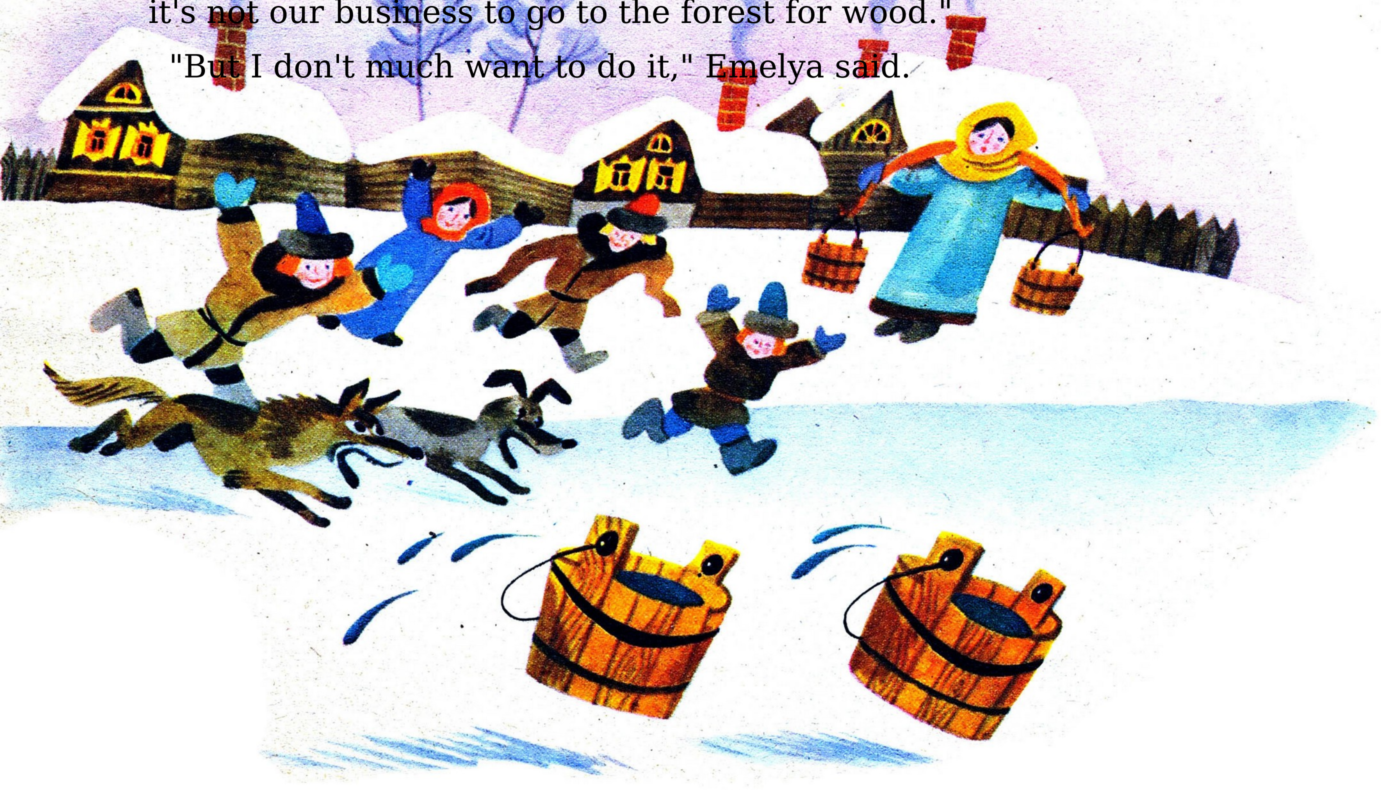
"If you don't do what we say, your brothers will bring no presents for you from the market."

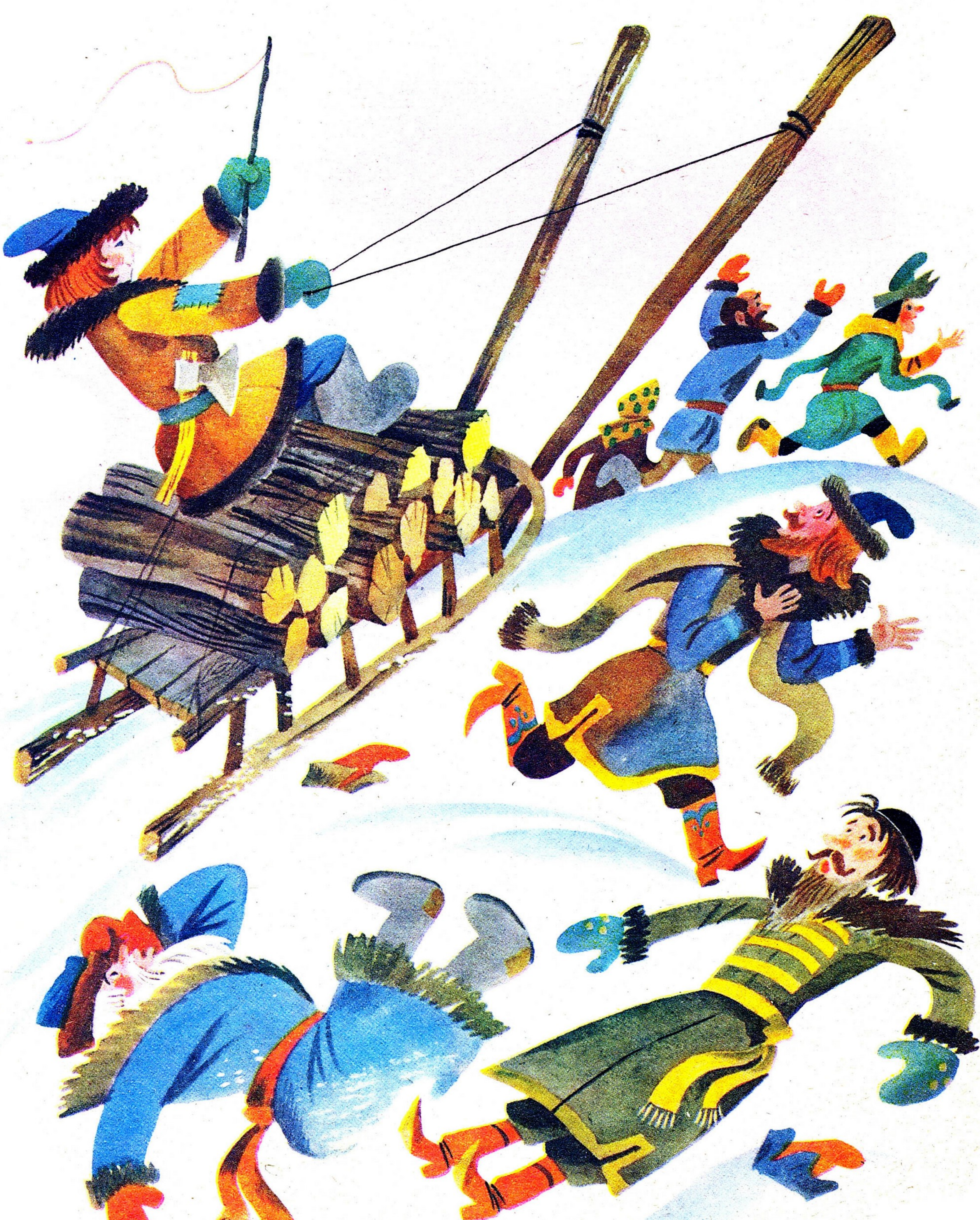
Emelya was loath to leave the stove ledge. He remembered the Pike and said under his breath: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Go and chop some wood, axe, and you, wood, come inside the house and jump into the stove." And lo! the axe leapt out from under the bench and into the yard and began to chop the wood, and the logs filed into the hut all by themselves and jumped into the stove.

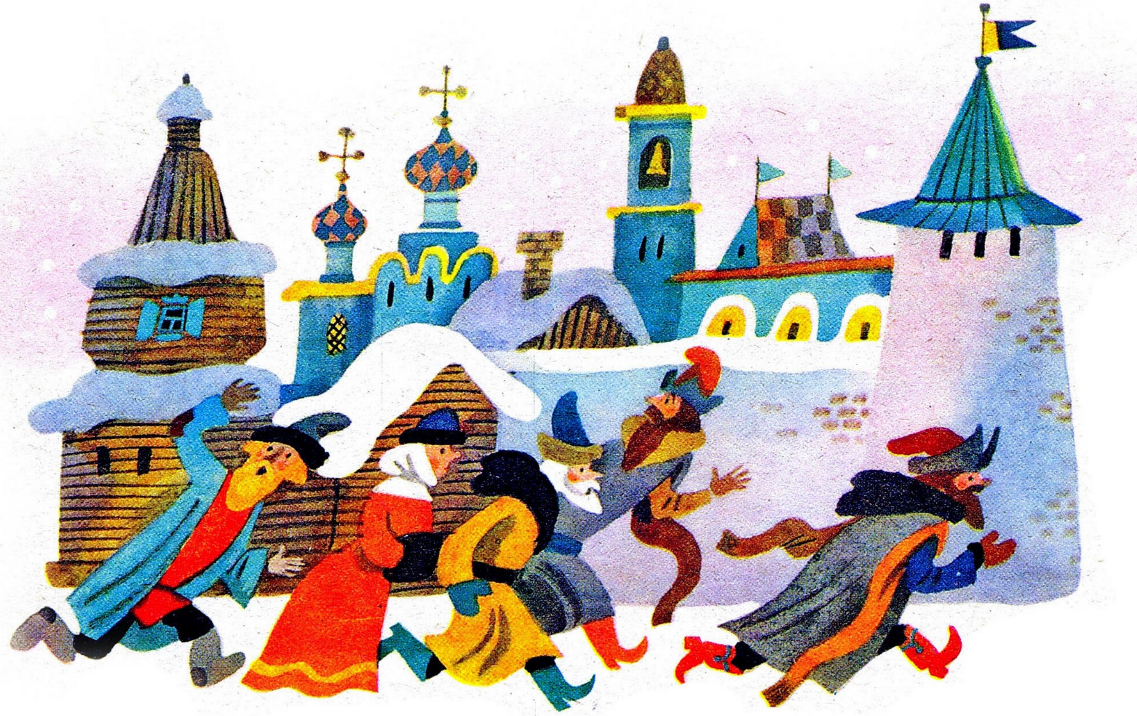
A long time passed by and a little time, and his sisters-in-law said to Emelya: "We have no more wood, Emelya. Go to the forest and cut some."

And Emelya, lolling on the stove, replied: "And what are you here for?" "What do you mean by that, Emelya?" the women said, "Surely it's not our business to go to the forest for wood."

"But I don't much want to do it," Emelya said.







"Well, then you won't get any presents," they told him.

There was no help for it, so Emelya climbed down from the stove and put on his boots and caftan. He took a length of rope and an axe, came out into the yard and, getting into the sledge, cried: "Open the gates, women!" And his sisters-in-law said to him: "What are you doing in the sledge, fool? You haven't harnessed the horse yet."

"I can do without the horse," Emelya replied. His sisters-in-law opened the gate and Emelya said under his breath: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go the forest, sledge!"

And, lo and behold ! the sledge whizzed out through the gate so quickly that one could scarcely have caught up with it even on horseback.

Now the way to the forest lay through a town, and the sledge knocked down many people. The townsfolk cried: "Hold him! Catch him!" But Emelya paid no heed and only urged the sledge on to go the faster.

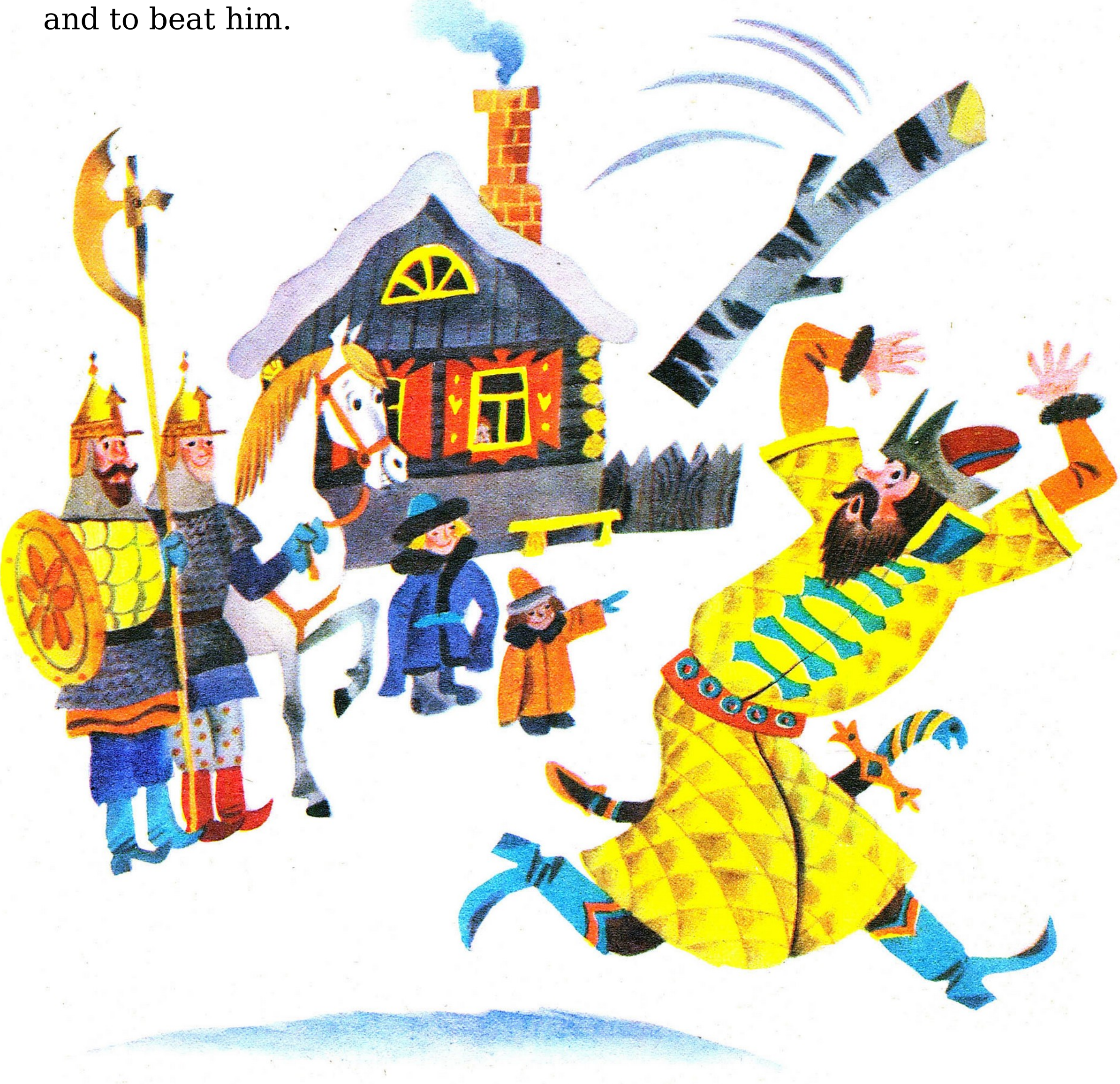
He came to the forest, stopped the sledge and said: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Cut some dry wood, axe, and you, faggots, climb into the sledge and bind yourselves together."

And, lo and behold! the axe began to hack and split the dry wood, and the faggots dropped into the sledge one by one and bound themselves together. Emelya then ordered the axe to cut him a cudgel, so heavy that one could scarcely lift it.

He got up on top of his load and said: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go home, sledge!"

And the sledge drove off very fast indeed.

Emelya again passed through the town where he had knocked down so many people, and there they were all ready and waiting for him. They seized him, pulled him out of the sledge and began to curse and to beat him.



Seeing that he was in a bad plight, Emelya said under his breath: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Come, cudgel, give them a good thrashing!" And the cudgel sprang up and laid to, right and left. The townsfolk took to their heels and Emelya went home and climbed up on the stove again.

A long time passed by and a little time, and the Tsar heard of Emelya's doings and sent one of his officers to find him and bring him to the palace. The officer came to Emelya's village, entered his hut and asked him: "Are you Emelya the Fool?"

And Emelya replied from the stove ledge: "What if I am?"

"Dress quickly and I shall take you to the Tsar's palace."

"Oh, no. I don't want to go," Emelya said.

The officer flew into a temper and struck Emelya in the face. And Emelya said under his breath: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Come, cudgel, give him a good thrashing." And out the cudgel jumped and beat the officer so that it was all he could do to drag himself back to the palace.

The Tsar was much surprised to learn that his officer had not been able to get the better of Emelya and he sent for the greatest of his nobles. "Find Emelya and bring him to my palace or I'll have your head chopped off," he said.

The great noble bought a store of raisins and prunes and honey cakes, and then he came to the selfsame village and into the selfsame hut and he asked Emelya's sisters-in-law what it was Emelya liked best.

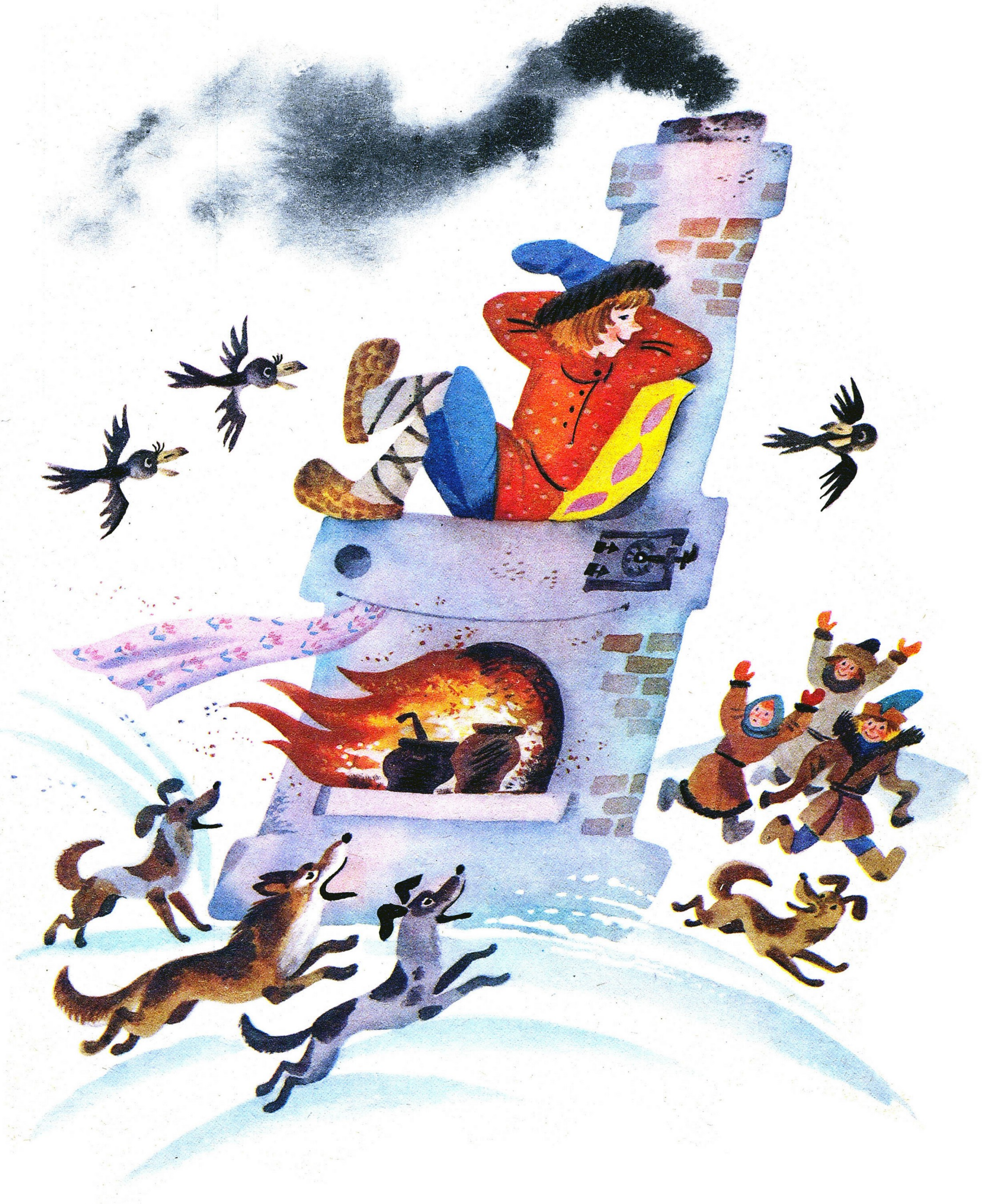
"Emelya likes to be spoken to kindly," they said. "He will do anything you want if only you are gentle with him and promise him a red caftan for a present." The great noble then gave Emelya the raisins, prunes and honey cakes he had brought, and said: "Please, Emelya, why do you lie on the stove ledge? Come with me to the Tsar's palace."

"I'm well enough where I am," Emelya replied.

"Ah, Emelya, the Tsar will feast you on sweetmeats and wines. Do let us go to the palace."

"Not I. I don't want to," Emelya replied. "But, Emelya, the Tsar will give you a fine red caftan for a present and a cap and a pair of boots."

."Emelya thought for a while and then he said: "Very well, then, I shall come. Only you must go on alone and I shall follow by and by."



The noble rode away and Emelya lay on the stove a while longer and then said: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Off you go to the Tsar's palace, stove!"

And lo! the corners of the hut began to crack, the roof swayed, a wall crashed down and the stove whipped off all by itself into the street and down the road and made straight for the Tsar's palace.

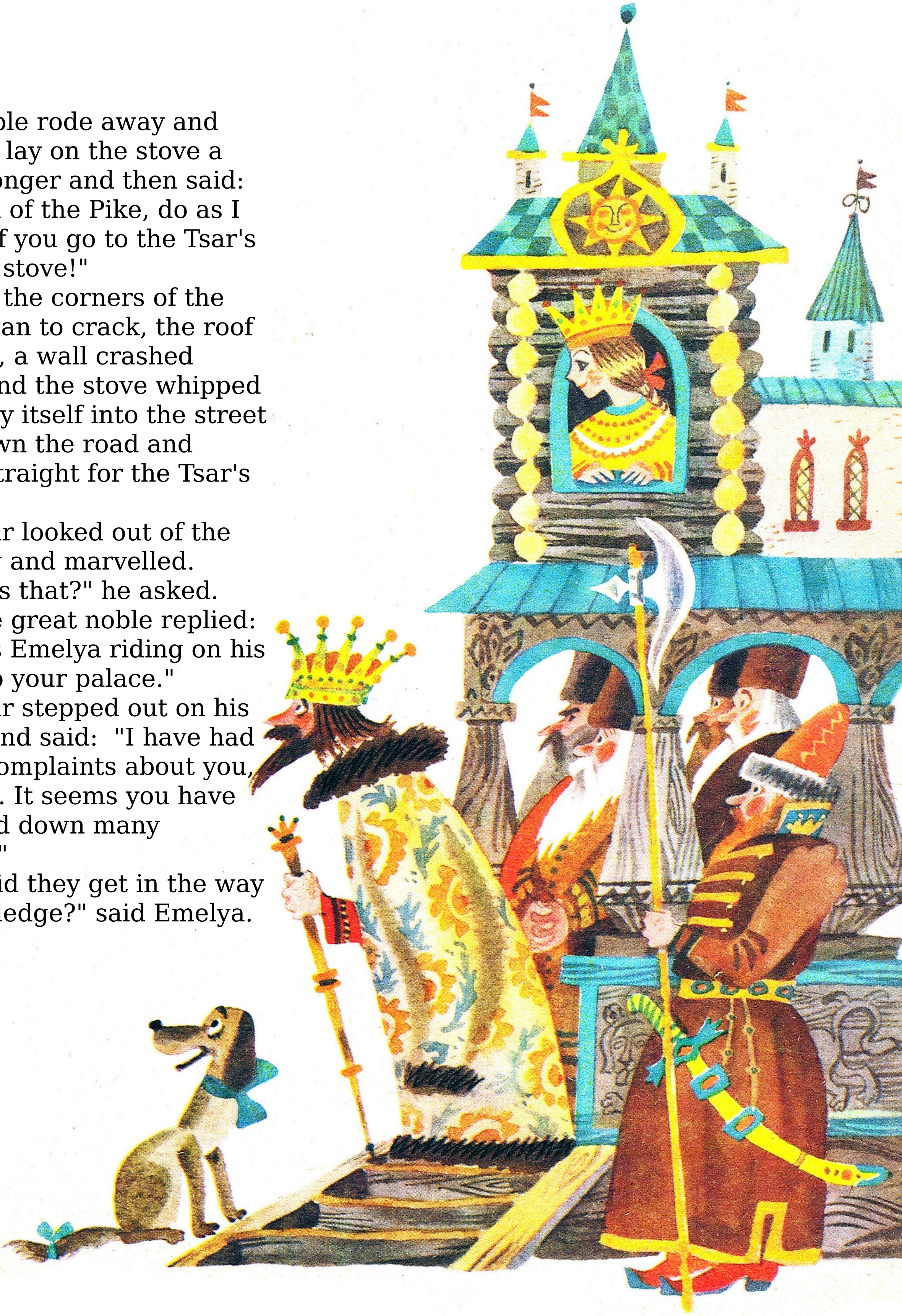
The Tsar looked out of the window and marvelled.

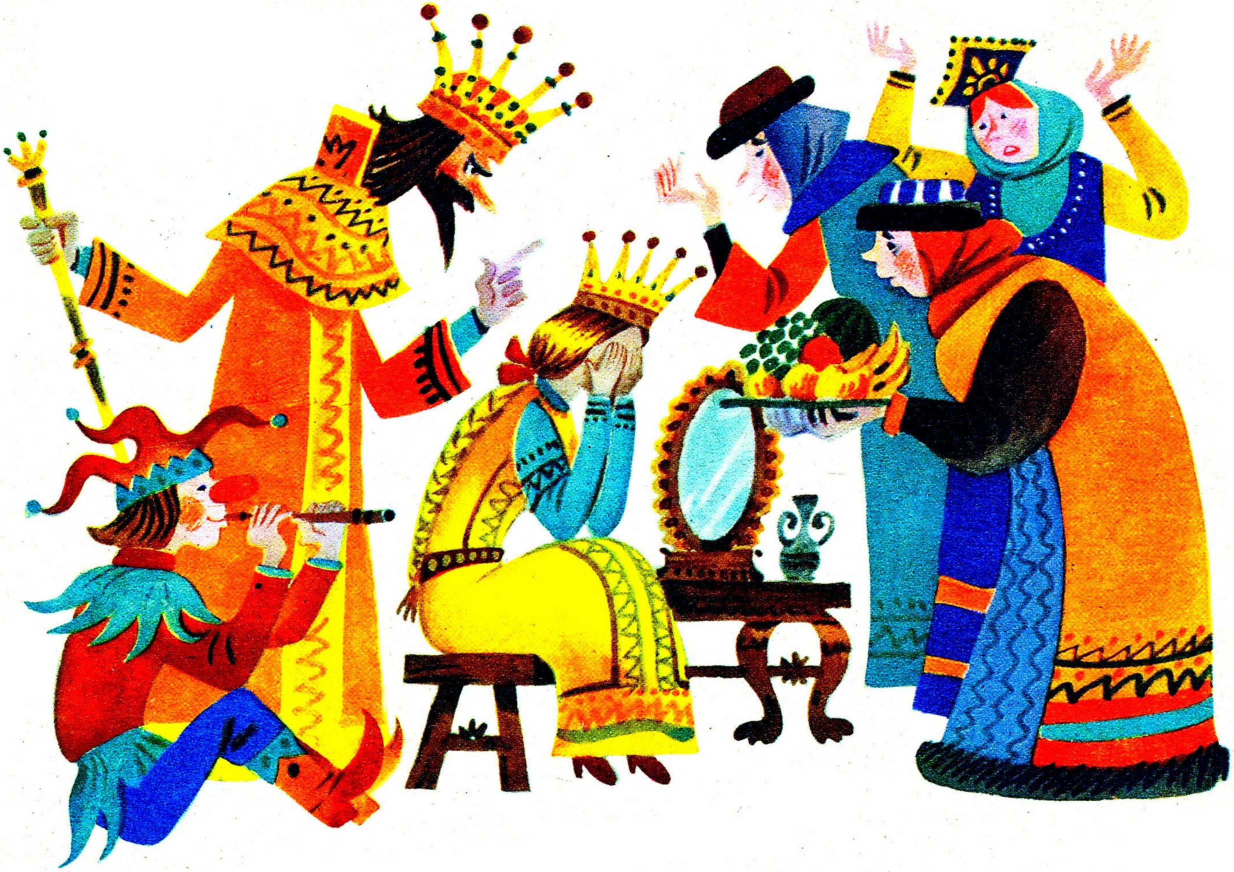
"What is that?" he asked.

And the great noble replied: "That is Emelya riding on his stove to your palace."

The Tsar stepped out on his porch and said: "I have had many complaints about you, Emelya. It seems you have knocked down many people."

"Why did they get in the way of my sledge?" said Emelya.





Now, the Tsar's daughter Tsarevna Marya was looking out of the palace window just then, and when Emelya saw her, he said under his breath: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Let the Tsar's daughter fall in love with me." And he added: "Go home, stove!"

The stove turned and made straight for Emelya's village. It whisked into the hut and went back to its place, and Emelya lay on the stove ledge as before.

Meanwhile, there were tears and wails in the palace. Tsarevna Marya was crying her eyes out for Emelya. She told her father she could not live without him and begged him to let her marry Emelya. The Tsar was much troubled and grieved and he said to the great noble: "Go and bring Emelya here, dead or alive. Do not fail, or I'll have your head chopped off."

The great noble bought many kinds of dainties and sweet wines and set off for Emelya's village again. He entered the selfsame hut and he began to feast Emelya royally.

Emelya had his fill of the good food and the wine, and his head swimming, lay down and fell asleep.

And the noble put the sleeping Emelya into his carriage and rode off with him to the Tsar's palace.

The Tsar at once ordered a large barrel bound with iron hoops to be brought in. Emelya and Tsarevna Marya were placed into it and the barrel was tarred and cast into the sea.

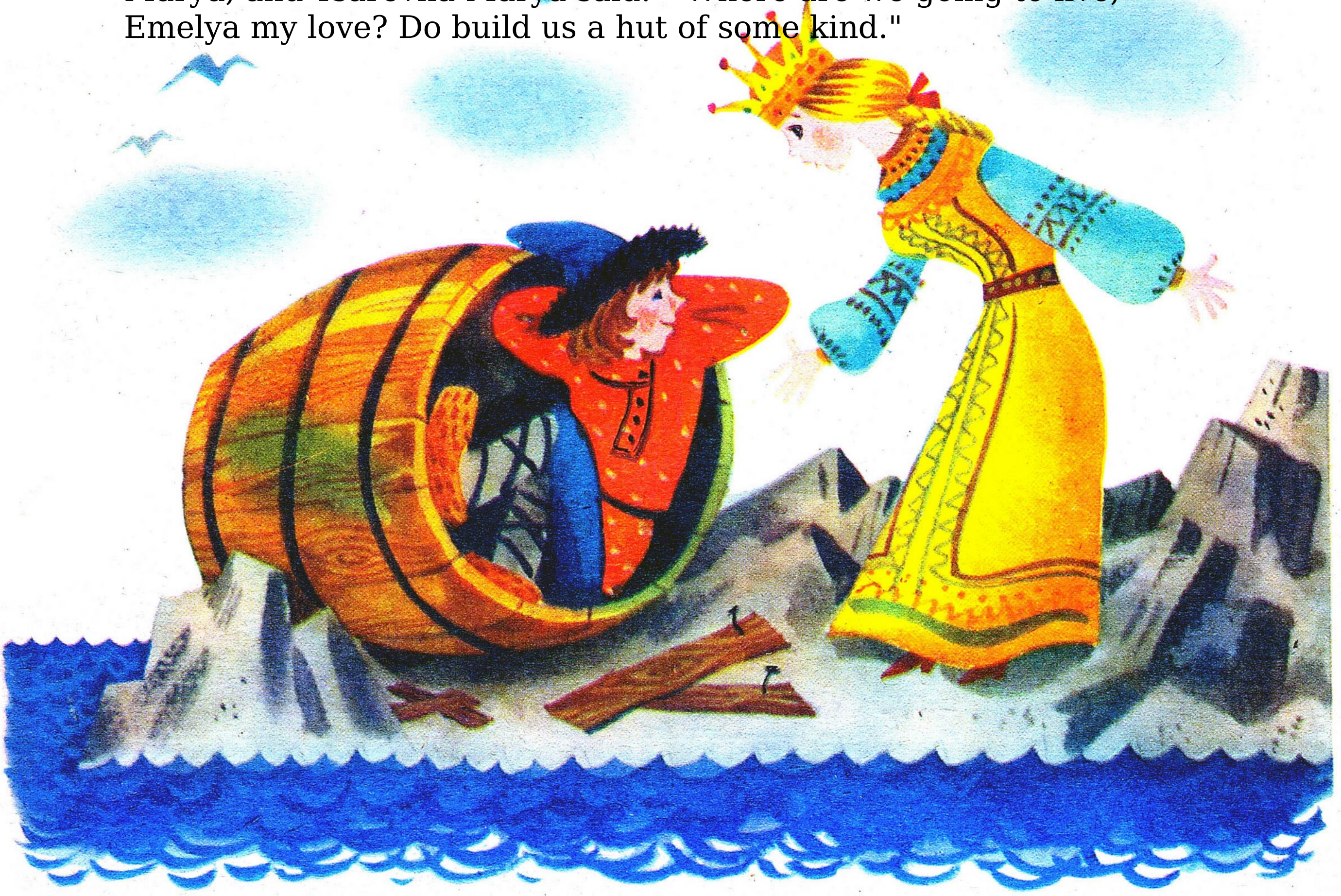
A long time passed by and a little time, and Emelya awoke. Finding himself in darkness and closely confined, he said: "Where am I?"

And Tsarevna Marya replied: "Sad and dreary is our lot, Emelya my love! They have put us in a tarred barrel and cast us into the blue sea."

"And who are you?" Emelya asked.

"I am Tsarevna Marya."

Said Emelya: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Come, o wild winds, cast the barrel on to the dry shore and let it rest on the yellow sand!" And, lo and behold! the wild winds began to blow, the sea became troubled and the barrel was cast on to the dry shore and it came to rest on the yellow sand. Out stepped Emelya and Tsarevna Marya, and Tsarevna Marya said: "Where are we going to live, Emelya my love? Do build us a hut of some kind."



"Not I. I don't want to," Emelya replied.

But she begged and begged and at last he said: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Let a palace of stone with a roof of gold be built!"

And no sooner were the words out of his mouth than a stone palace with a roof of gold rose up before them. Round it there spread a green garden, where flowers bloomed and birds sang.

Tsarevna Marya and Emelya came into the palace and sat down by the window. Said Tsarevna Marya: "Oh, Emelya, couldn't you become a little more handsome?"

And Emelya did not think long before he said: "By will of the Pike, do as I like! Change me into a tall and handsome man." And lo ! Emelya turned into a youth as fair as the sky at dawn, the handsomest youth that ever was born.

Now about that time the Tsar went hunting and he saw a palace where one had never been seen before.

"What dolt has dared to build a palace on my ground?" he asked, and he sent his messengers to learn who the culprit was.

The Tsar's messengers ran to the palace, stood under the window and called to Emelya, asking him to tell them who he was.

"Tell the Tsar to come and visit me, and he shall hear from my lips who I am," Emelya replied.

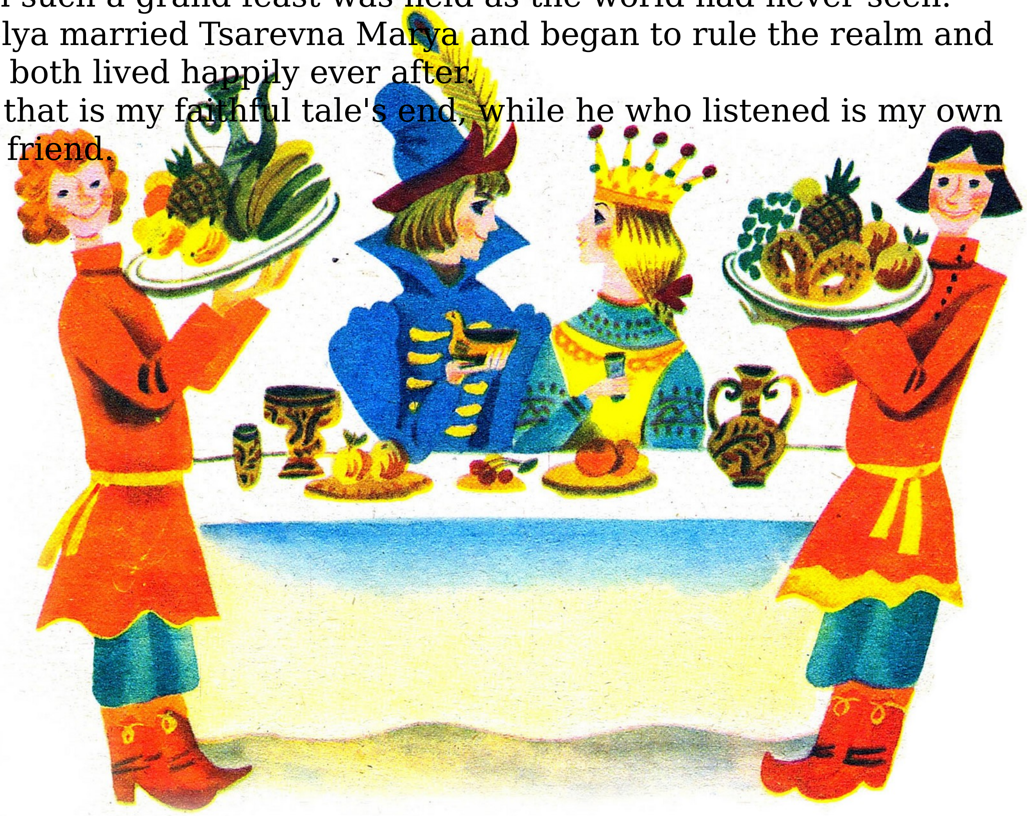
The Tsar did as Emelya bade, and Emelya met him at the palace gate, led him into the palace, seated him at his table and feasted him royally. The Tsar ate and drank and marvelled. "Who are you, my good fellow?" he asked at last.

"Do you remember Emelya the Fool who came to visit you on top of a stove?" Emelya said. "Do you remember how you had him put in a tarred barrel together with your daughter Tsarevna Marya and cast into the sea? Well, I am that same Emelya. If I choose, I can set fire to your whole tsardom and level it with the ground."

The Tsar was very frightened and he begged Emelya to forgive him. "You can have my daughter in marriage and you can have my tsardom, too, only spare me, Emelya," said he.

Then such a grand feast was held as the world had never seen. Emelya married Tsarevna Marya and began to rule the realm and they both lived happily ever after.

And that is my faithful tale's end, while he who listened is my own true friend.



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